

Analysis and Reflection: Why Is This Accomplishment Significant?

These conferences are very significant to my students and to their families. Sometimes they are the only time students and families have meaningful conversation about schoolwork, or students are able to ask for assistance and be proud of what they have accomplished. I know that the students and families appreciate the time and the structure because by the fourth conference each school year, there is nearly 95 percent participation with several hundred people filling our school cafeteria on a student-led conference evening. They are also significant because most of my students and their families do not have an academic background. Therefore, discourse around student work and the standards they are trying to achieve is often absent. Because the conferences begin by following a script, and because the students have done role-playing in our class prior to the first conference, students and their families are more comfortable with the process. Students are also able to conduct the conference in their home language, which also makes families better able to participate.

Analysis and Reflection: How Has What You Have Described Had an Impact on Students' Learning?

With student-led conferences, no one hides. Grades are not about what the teacher puts in the roll book, they are about what the student does in school. Students use evidence from their portfolios to document their accomplishments. Because students know early in the school year that there will be an audience for their work, they pay more attention to what they do. I know this is true because even for underperforming students, there is a significant improvement in their participation, completion, and quality of work between conferences. Sometimes my students report their parents have reduced the number of chores they require so they can do their schoolwork—a serious issue in a community where children are expected to contribute to the family income or care for younger siblings. Sometimes students complain because their parents begin to monitor TV and computer use more closely. By the fourth conference, at the end of the year, nearly all students and their families are in attendance. It's a celebration of student achievement. All in all, everyone wins. One year, a parent gave me a copy of the video *Mr. Holland's Opus* because of the impact I had on his son. I wish I could say that every student successfully passes from my ninth-grade classes, but that is not so. Most do meet the standards, and our tenth-grade teachers always tell me that my students are better prepared than are the students from most of the other teachers.

Documentation included copies of photos of a room filled with students and families, a short letter from a parent, and part of a reflection extracted from a student portfolio addressing how these conferences changed his academic life.